THE CEA CRITIC

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The D'Artagnan Epic

One night, many years ago, when people were flocking into the movie-houses to see Douglas Fairbanks in **The Three Musketeers**, I was walking down Seventh Avenue in New York City. At the corner of the next block was a group of pretty tough-looking youngsters from sixteen to eighteen or nineteen years old. One of them, in their midst, was holding forth in what seemed to be on oration or harangue. I was too far away to hear what he was saying. Just as I was getting within earshot, he raised his arm in an animated gesture that made me see Douglas Fairbanks (or D'Artagnan) with rapier in hand, and his voice rang out: "F' d' glawry o' France!" Murmurs of "Jeez!" and "No kiddin'?" encompassed him, and at this tribute to Dumas in the East Side dialect, I thought to myself, "How universally susceptible to noble impulse is the heart of man!"

At that period I had read **The Three Musketeers** several times. To me, as to those youngsters, it was an exciting romance, a field-day of incredible adventure. I had read **Twenty Years After** and had found it almost as good. I shared the general opinion that it was a kind of sequel to **The Three Musketeers**, a companion-piece that was not unworthy to extend one's pleasures. Later, I read of Dumas that he had employed hacks to assist him, so that he might turn out more of these popular romances. It was said that his invention flagged and that the brilliance of the first two novels was only now and then approached in the succeeding ones. I found it agreeable enough to believe these statements. Other reading intervened, and I more or less forgot about Dumas. I say "more or less" because it was about this time that my father returned from a trip to Paris with a 40-volume set of Dumas in the original French. Whenever any occasion took me home to New Haven, Dad got on the subject of Dumas at one time or another. But I never was home long enough to get digging into Dad's treasure. I had no set of Dumas myself, and I was not enough interested in the romances (as I called them) to go to the library for them. There is nothing to regret in that. Events come to their fruition when the time is ripe.

The circumstances of my life finally brought my family and me to an old mansion on the Hudson River which had been built by my great grandfather. In the attic was a "De Luxe Edition" (in English) of "The Romances of Alexandre Dumas." As most of my evenings were devoted to reading, eventually the fateful moment came when I started at the beginning. I followed D'Artagnan to the death of "My Lady" on the bank of the River Lys, to the death of Charles I of England on the scaffold and of Mordaunt in the waters of the North Sea, and through the bold Gascon's adventures in assisting at the restoration of the monarchy in England. I met with Louise de la Valliere, and Madame Henriette, the younger Buckingham, De Guiche, and the latter's star-crossed friend, Raul de Bragelonne. I saw Athos with grey in his hair, and Aramis drawing the unwitting Porthos into the contest between Fouquet and the King. I heard the world crumble around the four incomparable Frenchmen as the stupendous machinations of the jesuitical Aramis were wrecked upon the honorable scruples of a noble-minded thief and libertine. I shed tears over Athos and Raoul, choked over D'Artagnan's death at the moment of triumph, sniffled over the last will and testament of the generous Porthos, and found in Aramis' pathetic escape from his pursuers the irony of a relentless fate.

The volumes that followed **The Man in the Iron Mask** became fantastic. They were nevertheless a fascinating sequence, moving and diverting by turns. I was sorry when the last one had been read. The real story, however—the tremendous one which led you through triumphs to the ultimate defeat which life administers to all, even to a D'Artagnan—had closed with **The Man in the Iron Mask**. My thoughts kept returning to D'Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, Aramis, and poor Raoul. A thousand incidents made my eyes sparkle with recollection. My wife and daughters became somewhat exasperatedly amused with me for reading out passages which struck me as hilariously funny or inimitably skilful. I even thought of beginning again at the beginning, but it was too soon; I remembered too much. With a sigh, I went up to the attic and looked for other books.

In the course of the seven years which I spent in the old family home in New York State, not a year of the seven went by without my having read the six volumes of Dumas which begin with **The Three Musketeers** and end with **The Man in the Iron Mask**. During these reiterations, I came to regard the volumes, not as a series of novels, but as a grand panorama of action and events—a panorama of such magnificent scope and such essential unity of conception and aim that the common appellation, "The D'Artagnan Romances," seemed an insult to genius rather than a mere misnomer. That D'Artagnan alone of the four musketeers should be mentioned in the title did not trouble me in the least. He is the pivot of most of the action of the grandiose narrative. He is the epitome of the French genius, with its sensibility and good sense (bon sens). Athos, for all his nobility of soul, was unfit to survive an event beyond his control: the suicide of Raoul. Porthos, for all his largeness of heart, was the intellectual inferior of the other three. Aramis, for all his delicacy of perception and power of will and intellect, lacked scruple and lacked heart. D'Artagnan alone, preserving the balance of those other qualities by his cynicism, was indomitable in meeting the vicissitudes of life. No; the thing that struck in my crop was that word **romances**!

Ever since, my family and friends have heard me talk about "The D'Artagnan Epic." I shall never again, except by way of explanation, refer to this great work by any other term. What is an epic? It is first of all a narrative on the grand scale. It must have essential unity of plan. Its heroes must be a little larger than life-size. It must epitomize the ideals of a race, a nation, or a religion in such a way as to illuminate the sources of its culture. It may have minor and traditional characteristics such as freedom in the use of episode, the introduction of the marvelous or the supernatural, a beginning in medias res, and the like. I do not believe that it must be poetry in a literal sense, but only in a liberal sense, as **The Song of Roland** would be a poem even if if were in prose. In what respect, then, has Dumas given us less than an epic?

But I do not engage myself to prove a thesis. There is too much of that sort of thing going on, anyway. I am merely telling how a most satisfying idea came to me, and took possession of my mind, and greatly increased the joys of a vicarious existence in the beautiful and terrible world of D'Artagnan, Athos, Aramis, and Porthos. I have spoken of the work as grandiose, and its grandiosity is one of the things I like about it. In the theater, I like to have things done with something of a flourish, and I suppose that on the whole I prefer the florid Italian opera to the German.

But the test of a work of art is what happens to it in your mind when you encounter it again and again. Does it grow? Does it take on new beauties? Does it satisfy by its complexity and by the strokes of genius which make the incidental expressive also of the underlying idea? Does it sharpen the intellect, refine the emotions, and enlarge the soul? After ten years, now, of the D'Artagnan Epic, I have started on it again. If, at my age, I were wasting so much time on romances, I should feel ashamed. Well, I can read on with an untroubled conscience.

Perhaps you will say or think that this little personal narrative of mine deals with a trivial matter, with a mere quibble over a name? I grant it. I do not expect to revolutionize the criticism of Dumas' **chef d'oeuvre**. But after all, is it nothing to have discovered an epic?

Dean B. Lyman, Jr.
Adams State College

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Commentary

I am always happy to hear of our Association's activities . . . and I should be happy to serve it in any capacity designated.

Milton S. Smith
Hillyer College and
Trinity College

I have written Bob Fitzhugh, expressing admiration of his faithful and able work in the past and my confidence in his successor.

Since I retired five years ago I have found it hard to attend conventions, but my interest in the Association is as warm as ever. If I can help you in any way, please let me know.

Robert M. Gay
Chatham, Mass.

"I'm enjoying THE CRITIC more than ever . . . lively . . . varied and interesting format."

George S. Wykoff
Purdue University
Past President, Indiana College English Association

I like THE CEA CRITIC. It has, first of all, informality. When one reads as many scholarly journals as I do, he welcomes a relaxed style. Scholarly journals are very useful . . . but reading them several hours each day is like reading the *Atlantic* for breakfast, dinner, and supper. Also THE CRITIC deals with a problem which graduate schools too often ignore—the teaching problem. I am enjoying my studies, but I always try to keep in mind that soon I will be teaching students who do not have my background and inherent interest. Many of them will actually possess a strong dislike of English, a dislike I cannot dispel by living in a graduate world. THE CRITIC gives expression to this need for differentiation between scholasticism and the practical problem of teaching.

F. Boyd Collins
Michigan State College

Others have said it before but I should like to add my own voice of admonishment to the editor that he resist to the death any whispering temptation to make our publication a grand thing. The CEA CRITIC is perhaps the only professional publication to which I subscribe that I read column by column, front page to back, each issue. The brevity and informality, the friendliness and contention which characterize the CRITIC are to me its very life.

Incidentally, I have been delighted with the sparkling new variety in the set-up which you have brought to the sheet. The more our publication can reflect the free and lively interchange of talk that characterizes our regional and national meetings the better. The chap book gives adequate voice to the occasional superior and more formal discourse. Again I think I have never failed to read these chap books in their entirety. No doubt I have passed by many an equivalent excellent article in the *American Scholar* or *Yale Review*.

Russell Noyes
Indiana University

Mr. Wykoff's biting analysis of what too often we've tried to make of Freshman English courses was the only really satisfying thing in the March issue.

There are lots of things the CRITIC could do that would be of real service: analyze, for instance, the quality of the numerous composition textbooks, very few of which are worth a plugged nickel, and work toward a saner linguistic approach to matters of grammar and style. Such an undertaking would improve a good deal on the task of paraphrasing Wellek and Warren, since I assume that most of us read these gentlemen firsthand anyway . . . How about a review of Robert A. Hall's *Leave Your Language Alone*? It is a book which should surely be of interest—and of more value than the multitude of linguistically naive English teachers might suspect—to members of the association.

Robert Stockwell
University of Virginia

Editor's Note: A brief notice of *Leave Your Language Alone* appeared in the April issue of THE CEA CRITIC. We would be greatly interested in articles on the topics proposed above by Mr. Stockwell. In fact, we have suggested that he write them. But we have given him no monopoly. Our personal suggestion now becomes general.

Congratulations on the revived CEA CRITIC! You are providing excellent news and material for thought both. I was interested among other things in the correct account of Professor Matthiessen's regrettable death. We shall miss his excellent work in American literature.

Ernest E. Leisy
Southern Methodist University

I am much pleased with the CEA CRITIC and the manner in which it has been able to reach so many who otherwise would not have been heard as members of our profession. A perusal of its pages has revealed to me how many excellent teachers there must be in this broad land, and yet how inarticulate they are, and how many need bracing in untoward circumstances or through lack of proper preparation for their jobs. A thing like this is very heartening.

Our program should be severely practical in dealing with the perennial problem of how to turn out literate young men and women with just a hint of good taste and good training in reading. Whatever the CEA can do to foster such an objective should, in my opinion, be pursued with unabated energy. For that we could let fancy addresses by eminent educators go. (By this I mean no slur on anybody nor any program).

Percy Houston
Occidental College

THE CRITIC is a very stimulating, informative and constructive sheet. And it's brief enough so that one has time to read it.

David T. Nelson
Luther College

I enjoy reading THE CRITIC. It's animated, lively, disputatious; and I trust it will ever remain so.

Willis G. Jacobs
University of New Mexico

I have always vastly enjoyed THE CRITIC and have found it a provocative and lively magazine, containing many valuable suggestions as well as questions.

Renate C. Wolff
The Baldwin School

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I've Been Reading

J. GORDON EAKER
Literary Editor
217 Audley St., So. Orange, N.J.

Words Into Steel (Dutton, $2.75) by Hargis Westerfield is an especially stimulating little book of poems. Divided chronologically into five parts, the poems relate the author's experiences as a rifleman with the U. S. Army in the Southwest Pacific during World War Two.

These are extraordinary poems, for, though they present the horrors, terrors, and toils of war, Mr. Westerfield considers war as a life-giving experience. "War may be wrong; but here was a greatness of living I have not found elsewhere." Nonetheless . . . "There ought to be some other way besides war."

So many of these poems repay careful attention that it is not easy to select one's favorites. Among those that the reader will probably remember are "Prayer Before Dark," "Black Grenadier," and "Last Assault." For these are words arranged in such patterns that human experience is reflected unforgettably; these have intensity imaginative power, and universal meaning.

Words Into Steel is genuinely delightful reading.

J. Randolph Fisher
Savanah State College

The Mabinogion, a new translation with an introduction by Gwynn Jones and Thomas Jones (Dutton, 282 pp., Everyman's Library).

This new translation of the Welsh epic replaces the inaccurate and slightly bowdlerized version done by Lady Charlotte Guest and issued by Everyman since 1906. A reprint of the Golden Cockerel Press edition of 1948, it is based on the Welsh text in the White Book of Rhydderch, with a collation of the Red Book of Hergest (used by Lady Charlotte) and other MMS. It presents in full the four tales of the Mabinogi proper, the four independent native tales, and the three later Arthurian romances, all of which have been grouped together under the title *Mabinogion*. The introduction relates the stories to folklore and mythology and to the Arthurian literature of the Middle Ages. A short glossary would have been helpful for understanding some Welsh words untranslated in the text. These are graceful, readable tales of the two kings who chastely traded wives and realms for a whole year (no harm done), of the princess who, without hastening, outdistanced all pursuers, but stopped when politely asked, of a great blight ended by a bargain with a bishop, of a wife made of flowers, of a lovely daughter of a giant, wooed by the prodigious labors of Arthur and all his men. Perhaps the style of Malory is best for these tales; at any rate it is the one employed here.

Donald J. Lloyd
Wayne University

William Owens (Columbia)—chairman, Committee on Arrangements—announces that both Burges Johnson and Robert Gay are attending the Annual CEA Meeting. Dr. David Marke, Educational Features Editor for the Associated Press, will also attend, as guest of the executive secretary.

Personals

Fredson Bowers, University of Virginia, has been awarded the Phi Beta Kappa prize for his "Principles of Bibliographical Description," a work of some five hundred pages published by the Princeton University Press. Dr. Bowers' work was selected from seventeen published and unpublished works submitted by members of the University faculty and student body in the fields of the humanities, social sciences and law.

Elizabeth B. Stanton has been appointed dean of the faculty of the American College for Girls in Istanbul, Turkey. Dr. Stanton was an instructor at the American College of Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1932-35. She has taught at Ohio State, Stephens College and Denison, and has been Professor of English and dean of women at Beloit since 1947.

Indiana University

James R. Sutherland, University of London, is offering courses in literary criticism and eighteenth century during the present academic year. His appointment continues the English department's policy of inviting each year to the campus an outstanding literary critic. Last year's visiting literary critic was John Crowe Ransom.

Now added to the graduate creative writing staff is William E. Wilson, former Professor of English and Director of the Writers' Conference at the University of Colorado. Dr. Philip Wikelund has taken over as Chairman of English Composition to replace Professor Frank Davidson, who has retired from this position to return to full-time teaching after thirteen years in the directorship. Professor John R. Moore has been awarded a Senior Fellowship at the Huntington University Library carrying a stipend of $7,500 to complete his life of Daniel Defoe.

Honorary Life Membership is awarded to Subert Turbyfill, author living at the Panama Canal, it has been announced by Cyril Clemens, president of the International Mark Twain Society. The author of *My Panama Canal Theatre Adventure* is the first from his immediate vicinity to be so recognized.

Sacred Words

Can something be done to stem the ocean roll of clichés regularly heard at gatherings of English professors? Such jargon as "climate of opinion," "implement," "integrate," "functional in relation to student needs," "horizontal vs. vertical articulation," "comprehensive vs. restricted areas of concentration" (to avoid using "majoring"), "motivation," "articulation" "coordination," "evaluation," and the like marked the profundities of a single afternoon's panel discussion recently. Are such elegancies fooling our students, ourselves, or anybody?

Ernest E. Leisy
So. Methodist Univ.

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Notations for the Record

English, history, philosophy and politics are the most popular fields chosen by the thirty-three recent college graduates who have been awarded Woodrow Wilson Fellowships. The fellowships are granted by Princeton University to college graduates who possess "marked promise and ability for the teaching profession." This year the program has been expanded through the support of the Carnegie Corporation. Among the recipients is Walter H. Evert, Jr., Rutgers (Newark Colleges) 1950, to study English at Princeton.

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Dr. Whitney J. Oakes, co-administrator with Prof. George A. Graham, of the program explained that the Wilson plan of invitation fellowships permits Princeton "to say to a group of highly qualified young men that it is interested in their promise as scholars and teachers and that it therefore is extending to them an opportunity to find themselves intellectually, to try out their interests at the graduate level and thus to determine whether they wish to enter the profession of scholarship and teaching."

C.E.A. welcomes this program as one important contribution to the solution of our real Ph.D. problem.

A new major in American studies, which will enable students to view the entire field while studying a particular cultural aspect, was introduced in the Cornell curriculum this fall.

The purpose of the program, Dean Leonards Cottrell, Jr., said "is to provide a general liberal education, particularly aimed at good citizenship and an enriched cultural life in the United States."

The new major will require eighteen hours of study in the field of concentration and thirty-six in American studies, in contrast to the usual requirements of thirty hours of specialization and eighteen in related subjects. The program will be administered by a faculty committee headed by Prof. Henry A. Myers, representing the field of American literature.

Robert Frost, Simpson lecturer in literature at Amherst College, was awarded the honorary degree of doctor of literature at the third commencement exercises at Marlboro College. This is the twenty-third honorary degree conferred upon Mr. Frost.

Earlier, Mr. Frost received the honorary degree of doctor of literature from Colgate University at Hamilton, N. Y.

The Berg Collection of rare English and American literature at the New York Public Library has received as a gift the manuscript of the mystery thriller "I Say No: or The Love-Letter Answered," by Wilkie Collins, author of "The Woman in White," "The Moonstone" and other famous detective novels.

The 316-page manuscript, heavily revised on each page, offered clues to an appearance as a serial in the periodical, London Society, although bibliographies indicate that it was published in 1884 in book form only. The gift was made by Dr. Albert A. Berg, founder of the collection.

CEA Advisory Group Meets

An adjunct to the Annual CEA Meeting is a gathering of CEA officers—regional and national; past and present—and of other CEA workers, at The Players', New York, Dec. 28. There is provision for informal discussion of CEA developments and special responsibilities of CEA in the present emergency.

Among the participants: Burges Johnson, Robert Gay. William Clyde DeVane (Yale), Robert Fitzhugh (Brooklyn), Russell Noyes (Indiana), Maxwell H. Goldberg (Massachusetts), T. M. Pearce (New Mexico), Edward Davison (Hunter), Andrew Walker (Georgia Tech.), Joseph Hendren (Western Maryland), Kenneth Longsdorf (Franklin and Marshall), Belle Matheson (Beaver), Alan McGee (Mount Holyoke), Norman Pearson (Yale), Katherine Koller (Rochester), Ralph Tieje (Champlain), R. W. Pence (De Peauw), Jessie Rehder (N. C. Women's College), A. M. Lipscomb (V.M.I., representing Carl E. Tutwiler), F. Cudworth Flint (Dartmouth), Edward Foster (Georgia Tech.), Ellsworth Barnard, Ernest Van Keursen (Illinois at Chicago), Warren Smith (Rhode Island), Alvan S. Ryan; William Watt (Lafayette), G. Harris Daggett (New Hampshire), W. L. Werner (Penn. State), Samuel Bogorad (Vermont), Charles Coffin (Kenyon), Robert Mattuck (Goddard), A. L. Hench (Virginia), Walter Simmons (Rhode Island), Howard Vincent (Illinois Tech.), Morse Allen (Trinity), Douglas Wallace, Strang Lawson (Colgate).

Fall Regional CEA Meetings

In addition to the fall meeting of the NECEA. already reported in THE CRITIC as having taken place at Brandeis University on October 28, three other regional CEA meetings have been held this semester. Our California CEA held its conference at Whittier College, on Nov. 4; our Middle Atlantic CEA met at Johns Hopkins University, December 8; and our affiliate for Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina met at Chapel Hill, Nov. 18.

To the Middle Atlantic group, Kemp Malone talked on "The Well Taught Teacher." Among the papers presented at the Chapel Hill gathering was one on the basic problems of Sophomore English, by Herbert Dillard, of the Virginia Millitary Institute.

The newly elected officers of the CEA affiliate which met at the University of North Carolina are as follows:

Carrington C. Tutwiler, V.M.I., president
C. Herbert Huffman, Madison College, vice president
Jessie Rehder, Women's College of U. of N.C., secretary-treasurer.

According to a report received from Burges Johnson, who has been lecturing in the area, the regional CEA conference at Chapel Hill was very successful.

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